

Healdsburg may use treated wastewater for vineyards

Clark Mason, Press Democrat, 2-13-14

The historic drought and the emphasis on conserving potable water is bringing new urgency to using reclaimed wastewater for irrigation.

The Healdsburg City Council at 4 p.m. Friday is holding a special meeting to consider extending a pipeline from the city's sewer plant to provide highly treated wastewater to surrounding vineyards.

It also would make it easier for trucks to access and haul the water beyond Healdsburg, not only for vineyards and orchards, but for frost prevention and dust control.

“It's great quality water. There's people who could use it,” said Mayor Jim Wood. “It's a tremendous offset for potable water (use).”

Currently the state-of-the-art treatment plant discharges about one million gallons daily of “near drinkable” reclaimed water into a pond, which then leaches into the adjacent Russian River.

The city is under orders from North Coast water quality regulators to end those discharges into the river during the normal dry season. Healdsburg has long-term plans to build a pipe network to use the reclaimed water to irrigate its municipal golf course, vineyards, and parks.

But the approximate \$15 million system has been delayed by funding challenges and regulatory hurdles, including permission from water quality officials to use the tertiary treated effluent for irrigation.

Healdsburg officials believe Gov. Jerry Brown's drought proclamation in January and the state water board's policy encouraging water reclamation and reuse gives the city the authority to immediately go ahead with irrigation.

“It opens some doors we didn't feel were open before,” City Manager Marjie Pettus said Thursday.

Reclaimed water has been used for years in Sonoma County and other parts of California. In Windsor, it's used to irrigate parks, some subdivision lawns and sports fields. Santa Rosa sprays wastewater on pastures, and close to the Sonoma-Napa County line it's used on vineyards in the exclusive Carneros appellation.